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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 000731

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT PANS PIG FARM AT FORMER ROMA CAMP; ODS AND PRESIDENT PROTEST

1. (SBU) Summary: The Czech government's long-standing failure to remove a pig farm from the site of a WWII Roma concentration camp has resurfaced as a political issue following a critical European Parliament resolution and the allegation of President Klaus that the site was not a real "concentration camp." The stumbling block to clearing the site has been the cost, combined with the lack of effective lobbying by Roma groups. While the debate has prompted the new government to promise to take the issue seriously, with elections looming next year we expect little action on this, as in many other areas.

2. (U) Passage of a European Parliament (EP) resolution on April 28 calling for an end to discrimination of Romanies in member countries, perceived by some Czechs as unfairly singling out the Czech Republic, has reignited the dispute in the country over the site of a Nazi-era Roma concentration camp at Lety. The resolution calls for the removal of a pig farm on the site, and the erection of a suitable memorial. The pig farm was built over part of the former camp site by the Communist regime in the 1970s, and is currently home to some 15,000 pigs.

3. (U) The Czech opposition Civil Democrat Party (ODS), while not disagreeing that a solution should be found for Lety, has protested that the Czech Republic is the only country specifically named in the EP resolution, and declares that solving the Lety issue should be an internal Czech, not a European, matter. The ODS position on Lety is backed by their honorary chairman, Czech President Vaclav Klaus. Klaus, a firm opponent of the adoption of the European Constitution, appears to have seized the opportunity to spin the Lety issue into his own plans, claiming that the EP should not be interfering in Czech domestic politics. But in addition to bristling at the EP resolution, Klaus stated in a May 14 press interview that the camp was never a "concentration" camp per se, and rather a place where people were sent who "didn't want to work."

4. (U) Klaus is not alone in his revisionist view of history: a Czech Communist MEP, Miloslav Ransdorf, also stated to the media that there was never a "genuine" concentration camp in Lety. Klaus and Ransdorf's comments have caused widespread outcry, and former Human Rights Commissioner and journalist Petr Uhl has lodged a formal complaint against Ransdorf for his remarks. Uhl's complaint is based upon the Czech law which sets a prison sentence of up to three years upon those who publicly deny or question Nazi- and Communist-committed genocide. In addition to Uhl, new Czech Prime Minister Paroubek, Senate Vice-President Pithart, Interior Minister Bublan, Defense Minister Kuehnle and current Human Rights Commissioner Karasek have all also come out in favor of the removal of the pig farm at Lety.

5. (SBU) At a yearly memorial service held at Lety on May 13, Deputy Minister for European Integration of the Ministry of Regional Development, Vera Jourova, commented to Poloff that although Paroubek told her he sincerely feels the Lety issue should be solved by his new government, she was not optimistic he would succeed. Jourova, who was formerly General Director under Paroubek when he was Minister for Regional Development, noted that she maintains a close relationship with the new PM. Even if Lety is a government goal, the new leadership would have but a few months to act in autumn (after summer break) before focusing on pre-election campaigns at the beginning of 2006. The main stumbling block to removing the pig farm is the expense, further complicated because the farm was sold to a private owner ten years ago. Jourova commented that though the Czechs could probably secure EU funds for Lety, and the German government has also offered funding, she feels it is the Czech government's duty to move the camp. Vladimir Spidla, former PM and current European Commissioner, has also commented that although he agrees with the cause, given the cost of moving the camp (estimated at 600 to 800 million CZK, or 25-34 million USD), the funds might better be spent on improving the situation of existing Roma in the country before restoring the site.

6. (U) Although the Czech Roma community has called for removal of the pig farm for over ten years, the community's voice suffers from a lack of cohesion that would give it

strength. The Czech Republic has several Roma NGOs, a "Roma Parliament" created last year, and a Roma Democratic Party established some two weeks ago. However, none of these organizations seem to have anything good to say about any of their counterparts, and they do not work together. The Roma Parliament Deputy Speaker, who is also a member of the advisory body to the Government Council for Roma Affairs, has been sentenced for tax fraud and must therefore relinquish his position on the Council. Regional Roma Coordinators, hired by the government, bickered amongst each other at a recent meeting hosted by the Deputy Minister of Interior. This lack of coordination and cooperation amongst the Roma community hampers their ability to effectively lobby the government on issues like Lety, and also education, discrimination, and chronic Roma unemployment.

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